TAGORE AND HIS POETRY

C. S. H. Narayana Murthy, B. Sc. Final

Today the world is almost going to forget Tagore and his poetry with the advancement of millions of criticisms stemming out from the pens of some Western writers and Western literature and even a question like – Was Tagore indeed a great poet ? – has become not uncommon. The question, with its sceptical undertone, is often asked by some readers today, abroad as well as at home, who don't read Tagore in original. The scepticism contrasts sharply with the powerful impact of the English Gitanjali on its first publication in 1912 by the Indian Society.

Tagore is big enough and authentic enough to outlive this and perhaps other phases of scepticism; the number of reprints, till now, of Macmillan's English Edition of 1913, the continuing transltations of Gitanjali in numerous languages of all the continents, and further, the translations in various languages of some of his other works provide an indubitable evidence of his unabated popularity, even now, sixty years since his first appearance in the West and thirty since his death.

The intellectuals more often verify the established values of the past ages. Thus a total revaluation will be constantly brought about, and indeed the durability of a major author like Ravindranath Tagore's significance is tested through the verification and revaluation from age to age.

On the enduring value of Tagore's work, affirmative statements from eminent admirers still emanate profusely. Within the last decade, we heard Pearl Buck say—"His message is as living today as it ever was and never more necessary". The Rumanian author Alexander Phillippide finds in Tagore the 'poet of mankind' and Robert Frost said "He belongs little less to us than to his own country". The Czech scholar Dusan Labvitel thus asks and answers the questions : Has Rabindranath's poetry lost its vitality in our days ? Has it nothing or only very little to say to the young people of today— certainly not. Rabindranath's poetry has all the qualities which mark the works of the Masters of literature" – and Albert Schweitzer, a great social worker and rich scholar said : "This completely noble and harmonious thinker belongs not only to his country but to entire humanity". Persons, whose own contributions to civilisation has been outstanding, continue to regard Tagore, indeed as a great poet.

If however, the Western lovers and some of us of present day, somewhat inhibited by their absorption in the immediate and fluctuating, unable to place Tagore within the context of his tradition and having done so, thereafter discern the qualities of his thought and are that trancend the context of his own time and country still ask the question "Was Tagore indeed a great poet"- and an answer for such a question is there, in themselves, and the thing they have to do is to fill up the hiatus not only between them and Tagore, but between them and Schewitzer and Frost too. Much of the feelings expressed by critics in their recent evaluations of Tagore are that his writings have become irrelevant to the contemporary situation in India as well as the world outside. He has been called

an "Imposter" and his later works have been labelled as 'trash' even by his closest admirer W. B. Yeats. Even in India, his work is being under-rated. Why or how all this has happened is an intriguing mystery. It may be that people have become fed up with the Tagore's industry. It may be that the values of the modern society are the same as those of the days when he was lionised and awarded the Nobel Prize for the masterpiece 'Gitanjali' which presently has become the chief object of quest today or it may be that literary values have become radically changed. It may be even that God is really dead.

It seems that by linking up the ideas explicit as well as implicit in Gitanjali with the classics of Indian values, such as Upanishads, the Puranas, (Bhagavatham) the poems of Kabir and Vaishnavite literature especially in regard to (erotico devotininal symbolism) and by cross connecting these political ideas with the consciously, philosophical statements in Sadhana, the Santiniketan sermons and other essays of the poet, openly one has to affirm the Indianness and humanity of Tagore. An understanding of this Indianness is essential to a full and enduring understanding of Tagore, for an Indian as well as for a non – Indian. The total meaning of Tagore that emerges from the study, establishes the post as one much more than a mystic and a religious poet in a theological sense. Gitanjali is as unlimited as Tagore.

The spiritual ecstacy coming out of the Gitanjali, if one reads it that patiently and constantly without denial, one will confess that it is nothing but a repository of Reality, Truth and Divine love, which Tagore indeed experienced and the one which at present is lacking among the human beings.

Apart from the spiritual revivalists, like the Hippies, who do Bhajans constantly without any interruption from mundane considerations, there is a world-wide restlessness on account of the spiritual vacuum created by the present day progress in Technology. In this vortex of crisis, there is an awareness of the need of peace and pathetic cry for spiritual solace. People are discovering that they have lost the power to live as they have lost the power to love. This feeling is very much reflected in the writings of modern young rebels. It is not surprising, therefore, that a singer like *Mahalia Jackson* should say "Gospel songs are songs of hope. When you sing gospel songs you have a feeling there is a cure for what is wrong. I have a mission to sing for the people. When I am doing something for some one, I feel good."

Tagore's Gitanjali is a shock absorber, no less than a gospel song. The essence of his singing is not intended to escape from human strife into the "supreme being" or a heaven of hapiness. His singing is intended to refill the depleted heart of its power to love and to save it from the agonising cries.

Those who have spent these last two decades exclusively with 'modern poets' may turn a few pages of Gitanjali and see for themselves how refreshing they are. These songs are of hope and love, and will give them a feeling that "there is a cure for what is wrong."

In Gitanjali we go far beyond doctrine and ritualism. In Gitanjali, we have the Religion of Man, the Religion that comprehends the whole of life and nature, the Here and the Hereafter, the Boundless and the Limited, the Body, the Mind, and the Soul.

"What an enviable god writes Halldor Laxness, this god of Tagore the Great Friend, the Beloved, the Lotus Flower, the unknown man playing a lute in the boat yonder on the river."—

o — o